

VZCZCXYZ0000  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMN #0418/01 1971627  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 161627Z JUL 09  
FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9226  
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS MONTEVIDEO 000418

SIPDIS

WHA/BSC FOR MARY DASCHBACH

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [KFLU](#)  
SUBJECT: H1N1 FLU: DEATH TOLL HITS 15

Summary  
-----

¶1. As of July 15, Uruguay has 15 confirmed deaths from H1N1 influenza, with more than 1,500 cases suspected throughout the country. Despite an increase in numbers, public health officials continue to emphasize preventative measures, and only a few public activities have been suspended throughout the country. Tamiflu stockpiles are sufficient, despite anecdotal reports of visiting Argentines buying out local pharmacies. End Summary.

Status Update  
-----

¶2. To date, 15 deaths from the H1N1 virus have been reported by the Uruguayan Ministry of Public Health, with 132 hospitalized with a confirmed diagnosis. More than 1,500 Uruguayans are suspected of carrying the virus, but most of these patients will not be tested for H1N1, which is only checked in hospitalized patients following the declaration of a pandemic by the WHO June 11. Outbreaks have occurred in 17 schools, 3 businesses, and 11 other public organizations (sports clubs, etc.). There have been no confirmed cases in the Embassy community, and no American citizens are known to be infected with H1N1 in Uruguay. However, there has been a wave of Embassy employees suffering from flu and respiratory illness in the last few weeks.

The GOU Response: Pragmatic, but Wary  
-----

¶3. The Uruguayan government is emphasizing preventative measures in its policies, recommending that those who are demonstrating the symptoms of H1N1 stay home from work or school. The Ministry of Health has also advised against common behaviors that may spread the flu, including kissing as a greeting and the traditional sharing of the beverage mate. Officials have stressed the similarities between H1N1 and seasonal flu, emphasizing that H1N1 is much like the flu that most Uruguayans have experienced the rest of their lives, and should be treated in a similar fashion.

¶4. The GOU has not closed any public facilities, and there are no plans to prolong the winter break for Uruguayan students. In the departments of Soriano, Rio Negro, and San Jose, local governments closed cinemas, theaters, and discotheques against the objections of Health Minister Maria Julia Munoz, who accused one governor of "politicizing" the outbreak; all three departments are run by the opposition National Party.

¶5. Health Minister Munoz attended a summit July 15 in Buenos Aires intended to harmonize the policies of a number of South American countries in their efforts to confront the pandemic. Also in attendance were her counterparts from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Paraguay.

¶6. On June 23, the Ministry of Public Health accepted the CDC's donation of a Qiagen Viral RNA Minikit, which will be used by the national labs to isolate the virus from specimens for testing. According to the local Pan American Health Organization representative, Uruguay is sending influenza virus isolates and specimens to the CDC, though not with the regularity or frequency requested. He hoped that specimens would be sent more frequently following a week-long visit in June by two consultants intending to harmonize regional responses to the outbreak.

Tamiflu: Flying Off the Shelves, Into Argentina

-----

¶7. Reports of Argentines entering the country for the purposes of buying Tamiflu have increased in recent days, with pharmacies in places like Colonia and Montevideo's Carrasco Airport reportedly selling their entire stock of the drug to these pharmacological tourists. Despite the increase in demand, the GOU is still permitting the sale of Tamiflu over the counter, with no plans to require a prescription. However, the Ministry of Health has recommended against the use of the drug as to prevent the mutation of a drug-resistant strain of H1N1. Roche, the manufacturer of Tamiflu, resupplied a number of pharmacies earlier this week; the company maintains that the stockpile is sufficient to meet current demand.

Matthewman